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Francis L. D. Goodrich.

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THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ANN ARBOR,
A BRIEF HISTORY, ITS FIRST FIFTY YEARS

by Francis L. D. Goodrich

When the corner stone of the red brick structure for the First Presbyterian Church was laid in 1860 it contained a very brief history of the church from its organization in 1826 to 1860. Unfortunately it is only an outline and omits many things which it was hoped would be included. It does clarify certain statements about which there has been disagreement. It lists the membership of the church and Sunday School in 1860 but does not give the complete list of members which it says numbered 838 in the thirty-four years of its existence. In 1860 two of the charter members were still active in the church, Mrs. Deborah Farrand and Mrs. Elizabeth Allen, mother of John Allen, the founding father of Ann Arbor. Although James and Elizabeth Allen, parents of John, were charter members of the church, John does not seem to have been closely associated with the organization.

To quote from the manuscript history: "On the 21st of

August, 1826, at a meeting called in the School House in the Village of Ann Arbor, Michigan, for the purpose of consultation with reference to forming a church the Rev. Dunning was chosen moderator and the Rev. Noah M. Wells was chosen clerk. The consultation resulted in a unanimous resolve to form a church to be called the First Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor."

There were seventeen in all who voted to constitute the church, seven men and ten women. They had been members of churches elsewhere. The eighteenth in some lists was Mrs. Fanny Camp, who was baptized and joined the new church as its first non charter member.

Stephenson (p. 45) describes Ann Arbor of 1827 when the village was three years old in these words: "By the end of that year there were eight or nine stores of different kinds here, several taverns, a tennery, two sawmills, two or three grist mills and one blacksmith's shop. The population numbered between four and five hundred people. On July 9, when the first election in Ann Arbor was held for territorial congressman, 238 votes were cast. Two years later the number reached 444 and the local population was nearly 900."

The Ann Arbor of the summer of 1826 when the first protestant church west of Detroit was organized was a rapidly growing community which had welcomed its first settlers, John Allen and Mr. and Mrs. Rumsey, in February 1824, only two and a half years earlier. Its first public building had been the jail, of which Deacon Israel Branch was the jailor. A log house had been built by John Allen which was used as a school house when Miss Monroe opened the first school in 1825. It seems to have been used

for school purposes until 1829. The room was furnished by a few rude benches and a chair. The windows were single panes of glass 8 by 9 inches. (Beakes, p.720) This was the setting for the gathering of the pioneer Presbyterians.

Michigan Territory was considered a mission field by all the denominations. The first religious services in the community were conducted by a Baptist minister and the next by a Methodist preacher. The third denomination to come into the picture was the Presbyterian, but it perfected an organization which continued. This was due to the efforts of the Rev. William Page, who was a missionary sent by the Presbyterian Board to work in Michigan, especially in Washtenaw County and Ann Arbor. The new church did not have its own pastor installed until 1831, however. It was supplied by missionaries and ministers from neighboring churches, among them the Rev. William Page, the Rev. Charles G. Clark from the Webster church and the Rev. Roswell Pettibone.

As other places became available in the village for public gatherings the Presbyterians moved from the school house to the ball room in a tavern at the corner of Main and Huron Streets. It then moved for no apparent reason to a similar ball room across the street. Its next move was to an unfinished room in Cook's Hotel and from there it moved to a frame school house on the corner of Washington Street and Fifth Avenue. Here they worshiped until the first church was built in 1829. It was on the southwest corner of Huron and Division streets, a frame building originally 25 by 35 feet. Later it was extended 20 feet with an uncovered belfry. No paint was applied either

within or without the building but it had one coat of plaster. This building was abandoned in 1837 as it was on the outer edge of the village and too far from the center of the activities of the community. Also it was too small.

To understand denominational history in Michigan it is necessary to go back to the year 1801 when the Plan of Union was formulated. (Comin, p. 23) The preamble reads: "Regulations adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America and by the General Association of the State of Connecticut with a view to prevent alienation and promote union and harmony in those new settlements which are composed of inhabitants from those bodies.

"1.) It is strictly enjoined on all their missionaries to the new settlements, to endeavor by all proper means to promote mutual forbearance and accommodation, between those inhabitants of the new settlements who hold the Presbyterian, and those who hold the Congregational form of Church government." Sections 2 and 3 provide that if a Presbyterian church calls a Congregational minister or a Congregational church calls a Presbyterian minister, each such church shall continue its original organization.

"4.) If any congregation consists partly of those who hold Congregational form of discipline and partly of those who hold the Presbyterian form, we recommend to both parties that this be no obstruction to their uniting in one church and settling a minister. ."

This resolution was applied especially in Michigan in the early days To quote from Comin (p. 88), "In general then, it

may be said that, at the time we are considering, the Presbyterians were settled throughout the territory east of the Mississippi River while the Congregationalists were confined mostly to New England, Northern New York and the Western Reserve of Ohio."

The Plan of Union was abrogated by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1837, but the two denominations in Michigan continued to work as before until 1840. Thereafter the Congregationalists gradually withdraw from the Presbyterian churches and organized their own churches, or a church voted to transfer from one association to the other. The Congregationalists in Ann Arbor did not withdraw from the Presbyterian church until 1847. I have never seen this national move given as one of the reasons why the local group made the change, but It must have had at least an indirect influence.

It is pertinent to note the regions from which the seventeen charter members of the Ann Arbor church came.

James Allen and his wife Elizabeth, parents of John, were from Augusta County, Virginia, a Presbyterian region.

Orville Barnes journeyed to Michigan with them. He was a school teacher, originally from New England but then living in Virginia.

Ann Isabella Allen was the second wife of John Allen, a son of James Allen. She came from Virginia with her father-in-law

Bethuel Farrand and his wife Deborah came from Cayuga County, New York His firct trip to Michigan was made on foot. He was the first probate judge of Washtenaw County.

Harriet Parsons was a Connecticut girl who came west to teach and do missionary work. In the summer of 1825 she assembled the first Sunday School ever held west of Detroit. It met in the woods about half way between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. She became the wife of Lorrin Mills.

Mrs. Monroe was another charter member. That her husband was John Monroe, contractor for the railroad between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor is probably not correct Where she lived before coming to Michigan is not on record.

Temperance Roberts was a charter member but there is nothing about her in any of the books.

Phebe Whitemore or Whitmore was the wife of Luke H. Whitmore for whom Whitmore Lake was named. They were from Seneca, New York He joined the church in 1830.

Israel Branch, elder and deacon, sexton of the church and jailor for the village lockup was probably from New York state, with his wife Mercy. He was greatly interested in theology and enjoyed doctrinal discourses.

Richard Lord appears to have been a single gentleman who did not leave a mark on the community. He may have been related to Dr. Lord the first physician in the village. He continued in the church and was one of the three men who were charter members who appear in the list of members in 1841.

It is impossible to account for Roswell Parsons and his wife Agnes There were several Parsons families among the early settlers of the county but how Roswell is connected to them is a mystery. He may have been a farmer rather than a townsman. His name appears in the 1841 church list as a trustee. His wife's name is also in the 1841 list.

These are the seventeen charter members. The earliest list of members of the church was printed in 1841. The Michigan Historical Collections has one of two known copies of the pamphlet. The men and the women are in separate lists and are arranged not alphabetically but chronologically by the years they joined the church Of the seventeen charter members only three men and five women were active after fifteen years.

During the first decade of the church's existence only one minister was installed as pastor, the Rev. John Beach, 1832-1838. It seems that Mr. Beach went to Flint as pastor of a Congregational - Presbyterian church there after leaving Ann Arbor, as in 1840 he represented that church at the meeting of Detroit Presbytery.

Some time prior to the coming of Mr. Beach, possibly in 1828 29, Mr. James Kingsley was assisting in the church services. He wrote (Stephenson p. 378) "I was lay reader for the Episcopalians and Presbyterians inculcating hightoned Calvanism in the forenoon and very different doctrine in the afternoon from the same desk, as the two congregations worshiped in the same house."

By act of General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1834 the Synod of Michigan was "erected." It was composed of the churches in Detroit, Monroe, and St. Joseph Presbyteries. The Ann Arbor church had just been transferred from Detroit Presbytery to the newly constituted Monroe Presbytery. (All the churches in a region are organized into Presbyteries; the Presbyteries with their churches in a state are organized into a Synod) The Ann Arbor church was at first in Detroit Presbytery. In 1833 it was transferred to Monroe Presbytery but

it did not continue long in this group, for in 1837 it became a member of Washtenaw Presbytery. In 1870 there was a reorganization throughout the denomination when the Old School and the New School were united Washtenaw Presbytery was then joined to Detroit Presbytery and Ann Arbor has been in that Presbytery ever since.

The first meeting of the Synod of Michigan was held in Ann Arbor on September 23, 1834, with twelve churches represented. Its last meeting in this city was in 1947 when there were 145 churches represented.

At the close of the Rev. Beach's ministry the second church was erected by the Presbyterians. It was a frame structure a whole block nearer the center of the village. It, too, was on the south side of Huron Street Unfortunately there is no picture extant of it and only a very brief description of it. It was an oblong structure placed near the middle of a large lot extending from Huron to Washington streets with the short sides toward the streets (See Map of City of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, Michigan 1854 Surveyed and published by D. A. Pettibone, Ann Arbor.) When the brick church was built in 1862, the old building was moved backwards to the north side of Washington Street where it was refitted for business and residence purposes. The only description which has been found is taken from the manuscript History of the Presbyterian Church in Michigan by T. and A. Marsh. To quote: "In 1837 a church was built on on Huron Street between Fourth and Fifth Avenues which for many years was regarded as the most important church building in Ann Arbor With its gallery it accommodated the largest audiences

that were gathered in the village. The Commencement and Junior Exhibition of the University for nearly a score of years were held in it." This statement has been questioned, however. Miss Farrand in her History of the University says that Commencement Exercises were held in the churches. The first Commencement was held in the Presbyterian church. The exercises in 1861 were in the Methodist church, those in 1865 in the Presbyterian church.

In this church the practice of "selling the pews" was followed, and that is true for the brick church also. There is a deed extant of such a sale which reads: "Know all men by these presents, that we, Roswell Parsons, Thomas M. Ladd, Harvey M. Thompson, George Sedgwick, Mitchell Ecker, and Fitch Hill, Trustees of the First Presbyterian Society of Ann Arbor in the County of Washtenaw, State of Michigan, in consideration of Ninety five dollars, to us in hand paid by H. Partridge, the receipt is hereby acknowledged, have granted, bargained and sold, and do hereby grant, bargain and sell unto the said H. Partridge his heirs and assigns all that slip or pew in the Meeting House lately erected by said Society, number ten in the plan of said Meeting House...to have and to hold the same with the privileges and appurtenances thereto belonging, to the said H. Partridge his heirs and assigns, so long as the said House stands for his use only as a seat in said Meeting House, subject to such rules and regulations as may be legally made by said Society. In testimony whereof the said Trustees have hereto set their hands and the corporate seal this twenty-seventh day of December, A.D. eighteen hundred and forty-three."

Signed by the six trustees named above. Attached is a Notary Public acknowledgment.

After Mr Beach left there was an interim of five years when the church was without a settled pastor. In 1842 the Rev. William S. Curtis, D.D., was called. He served as pastor from 1842 to 1855. Dr Comin says of him (p. 43): Dr. Curtis was an exceptionally able man intellectually. He was a strong sermonizer and a leader among men. His twelve years pastorate in the early years of the church and of the University gave influence and prestige to the Ann Arbor Presbyterian Church, not only in the growing young city but wherever the students from the University might go." He became Professor of Moral Philosophy in Hamilton College and later President of Knox College.

About a year after Dr Curtis's leaving, the Rev. Lucius D. Chapin was called to the pastorate He had been supplying the pulpit some months before he was formally installed. In 1863 he resigned his charge and became professor of mental and moral philosophy in the University of Michigan. It was during Dr. Chapin's pastorate that the brick church was built, on the site of the original church. You will remember it with its tall spire and lesser tower, its ground floor rooms and the sanctuary above with the gallery all around it. The organ and choir were in the gallery behind and above the pulpit. The Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City is of the same design. The Ann Arbor church cost $35,000.00. From the number of references to this project in the Ann Arbor papers it is evident that the whole community was greatly interested in it.

The ladies of the church were always an active group. To quote from an article by Miss Ellen Bach on Women's Work in the Church: "Sometime between the years 1843 and 1855, while the Rev. William S. Curtis was pastor, his wife, who came from Mt. Holyoke, organized the women of the Presbyterian Church into what was later called the Ladies' Aid Society. The ladies met every two weeks to sew and towards evening were frequently joined by the men for supper at which tea, biscuits and a relish were served, for which ten cents was charged... During the Civil War the ladies sewed regularly for the soldiers."

On occasions some special function was held in the church or was conducted by some group connected with it. In the church archives is a poster program announcing a "Concert By the choir of the First Presbyterian Church, This Evening, Prof. Whitney Organist, Miss Swathel Pianist, J. Ward Flute, L. Mead Trombone " There were choruses, glees, songs by three or six men and women Two of the choruses are noted as Specimens of Old Fashioned Music " "Admittance...Twelve and a half cents. Tickets at the Book Stores of Maj. Moseley and Judge Perry. Doors open at half past 6 o'clock. Tuesday, March 4, 1845."

A notice in the Michigan Argus March 8, 1843, announces "A lecture will be delivered at the Presbyterian Church, in the village on Thursday evening, by Dict Hume, before the different Sabbath schools on the historical events of the Bible. The lecture will be illustrated by pictorial representations, seen through a magic lanthorn." These lantern slides were probably painted as the Daguerre photographer

process was not invented until 1839. Magic lanterns had been in use for at least a century prior to the invention of photography. "Children belonging to the Sabbath schools and ladies admitted free. Gentlemen 12½ cents each. Lecture to begin at 7 o'clock precisely."

A paragraph in the Argus for February 8, 1856 reads: "Young Ladies' Festival - The Young Ladies of the Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, will hold a festival at the Franklin House on the evening of Thursday, the 14th of February, 1856 A large and elegant assortment of acticles, the handiwork of the young ladies, both useful and ornamental, will be offered for sale. The tables will be spread with all the luxuries of the season and every exertion will be made to enable guests to enjoy themselves amply. A Valentine post-office will be opened and special pains taken to deliver all dispatches. A general invitation is extended, by order of the Committee." A note of a later date says that about $150 was realized at the Festival.

A very unfortunate event occurred just as the brick church was nearing completion. The story was told by Miss Cynthia Sager, whose family was very active in the church for many, many years. The ladies had raised sufficient money to purchase new carpets and cushions for the pews. A day or two before these were to be ordered one of the leading men of the church to whom the funds had been entrusted failed and the money was lost to the ladies, who had perforce to do the best they could with the old equipment.

After Dr. Chapin resigned there was a period of three years when the church was without a settled pastor. The Rev. W. W. Wetmore and the Rev. David Torrey were stated supplies.

On November 7, 1867, the Rev. William J. Erdmann, D.D., was installed as pastor of the church, but he stayed only three years. He was an especially successful Bible teacher and an excellent preacher. His son became a professor in Princeton Theological Seminary and his granddaughter* is the wife of a minister, not a Presbyterian, who has lived in Ann Arbor for a number of years. During Dr. Erdman's pastorate a debt of several thousand dollars was paid by the church.

There was an interregnum of a few months after which the Rev. Samuel W. Duffield was installed as pastor, October 18, 1871. He was a third generation Presbyterian minister. His grandfather, the Rev. Dr. George Duffield, had been a very distinguished pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Detroit. His father, George Duffield, Jr., held several different pastorates in Michigan. He was the author of the once popular hymn, "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus." Samuel Duffield stayed in Ann Arbor only three years. The church was active during those years, as the organ was renewed, the hammer beams were installed in the ceiling of the auditorium, and the church tower was constructed. The new bell was purchased which bears the inscription "Ring out the darkness of the land, Ring in the Christ that is to be."

When the Rev. Samuel Duffield died, in Bloomfield, New Jersey, May 12, 1887, the Ann Arbor church entered a resolution on its records which reads in part: "The hearts of the people gratefully cherish the memory of his success. The Young People,s Association is a living memorial of his efforts,

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* Mrs. Henry Lewis

and the house of worship in its completion gives pleasant memories of his activities."

The next minister to be installed as pastor was the Rev. Fred T. Brown, D.D., who served the church for the years 1875 to 1880. The outstanding event of this period was the celebration of the semicentennial of the church, August 20 and 21, 1876. It brought to Ann Arbor Simeon Mills, one of the three charter members then living. The other two not present were his wife Clarissa and Mrs. Deborah Farrand. Mrs. Fannie Camp, the first non-charter member of the church, was then a resident of Grand Rapids. Three former pastors of the church participated in the program, the Rev. W. S Curtis, the Rev. S. W. Duffield and the Rev. Lucius D. Chapin. On Sunday morning Dr. Curtis preached the sermon. There was a Communion service in the afternoon in which members of other churches joined. In the evening Dr. Duffield conducted a service with the Young Peoples' Association at 6:30. At 7:30 the large auditorium was filled by people of all denominations when short addresses were made by Dr. Duffield, Dr. Chapin, the Rev. Calvin Clark, who had often visited the church as a missionary during the past forty years, the Rev. Loomis Chandler, an early member of the church, and the Rev. W. S. Curtis. The semicentennial exercises were continued on Monday afternoon at half past four o'clock. Mr. J.Q.A. Sessions was the speaker. He gave a history of the church. An abstract of this address is found in the Ann Arbor Courier for Friday, August 25, 1876, and is the source of much of the data about the church in the books. This meeting was followed by a banquet in the church basement

at which Judge E. D. Kinney, Prof. Martin D'Oogy of the Congregational Church, the Rev. W. S. Curtis, Mr. Simeon Mills, aged 82 and one of the charter members, spoke briefly. The exercises were then adjourned to the auditorium where more speeches were made and letters read from former members not able to be present, including messages from the Rev. Noah W Wells, a founder of the church, at this time in his 96th year, and Mrs. Page, wife of the first minister To quote from the newspaper: "Thus ended a very happy and every way successful celebration of the semicentennial of the First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor."

When Dr. Brown died the church entered in its minutes this tribute to him: "A faithful servant of Christ, giving himself, his family and all his interests without reserve to the service of his Master, he has been an eminent example of unswerving loyalty in the Christian Ministry. Of ripe scholarship and fine literary grace, his gifts were directly devoted to the work of his sacred calling." (Goodrich p. 24)

This takes the church through its first fifty years. There are seventy five more years of history for it which must be covered in a paragraph. There were five installed pastors during those years: Richard H. Steele, D.D., 1880 1887; Joseph Mills Gelston, D.D., 1888-1909; Leonard A. Barrett, D.D., 1911-1924; Merle H Anderson, D.D., 1924-1934 and William P. Lemon D.D. 1934-1951. The centennial of the church was celebrated in 1926. The old building on Huron Street was sold and a new church erected on Washtenaw Avenue 1934-38.

SUMMARY OF THE YEAR'S PROGRAMS

The Impressions for 1955-56 will have published five papers which were presented at our meetings:

"Life of 'Dr.' Tom Lovell," by Dr. C. Howard Ross;

"From Washtenaw County to China in 1847," by Dr. F. Clever Bald;

"The First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, A Brief History, Its First Fifty Years," by Francis L.D. Goodrich;

"The History of Saline," by Bessie Collins; and

"People and Places I Remember in Old-time Saline," by Mrs. L.A. Catey.

Several other interesting programs were presented at which the talks, based on extensive study, were given extemporaneously; hence in these cases there was no manuscript for publication:

"Indian Lore," by Dr. Howard Peckham;

"Streets and Buildings in Old Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti," with slides and commentary by Lela A. Duff for Ann Arbor and Louis S. White for Ypsilanti.

"The Circuit Court in Washtenaw County before the Civil War," by Judge James Breakey.

A new publication has appeared with the blessing if not the active sponsorship of this society, the Washtenaw Junior Historian. Growing out of a program arranged for us by the pupils of LeRoy A. Cappaert at Tappan Junior High School, Ann Arbor, two numbers have now been published, the first one general in its coverage of local history, the second devoted to the life and accomplishments of Miss Bertha Muehlig.

The annual Pilgrimage is to be a conducted tour of the new Ann Arbor High School, followed by dinner at the American Legion home.

THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

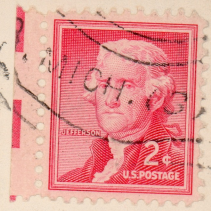
After the desperate struggle Washtenaw Historical Society has made to find storage space for our historical collection, and our vain efforts to establish a Historical Museum in Ann Arbor, I wondered just how many communities had had more success. I contacted the Michigan State Historical Society and received from Mr. Beeson's office a list of the Museums in the State. From this I have compiled a list of Historical Museums in Michigan. Even a casual study of this list ought to put the City of Ann Arbor to shame, for many places of less importance are proud to support a Museum for Historical articles which claim the interest of tourists and visitors. Surely Ann Arbor has much to offer besides the University, of which we are justly proud.

Here is the list of Historical Museums in Michigan.

Bay City - Bay Co. Hist. Museum.
Berrien Co. - Niles - Hist. & Natural History
Battle Creek - Kingman - Hist & Nat. History
Calhoun Co. - Marshall - History
Cass County - Cassopolis - History
Genesee Co. - History - in Flint
Grand Traverse County - Traverse City - History
Ingham County - East Lansing - Hist & Nat. Hist. (M.S.U.)
Lansing - Mich. Hist. Museum
Kent County - Grand Rapids - Hist. Furniture, Arts & Crafts
Keweenaw County - Copper Harbor - Hist.
Lenawee Co. - Walker Tavern - Hist.
MacKinac County - MacKinac Island - Fort Hist. Museum
St. Ignace - History
Manistee County - History - Manistee
Marquette County - Marquette - History
Mason County - Ludington - History
Menominee County - Menominee - History
Monroe County - Monroe - History
Muskegon County - Muskegon - History
Ottawa County - Holland- Baker Museum for Furniture Research (Hist.)
Netherlands Museum - History
Saginaw County - Saginaw - Art & History
St. Clair County - Port Huron - History
Washtenaw-
Ann Arbor - None except Kelsey Museum - mainly Egyptian & Near East - Hist.
Ypsilanti - None
Milan - None
Chelsea - None
Dexter - None
Saline - None
Manchester- None
Wayne - Dearborn - History
Henry Ford - History
McFadden - Ross- History
Detroit - Det. Hist. Museum -
Fort Wayne Military Museum - Hist.
Museum of Great Lakes History

Won't you help us put Washtenaw County on the positive side of this list?

Katherine S. Groomes, President



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